Information Resources Management

Education: IS Managers’ and Educators’ Views

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This paper reports the findings of a survey designed to discover the degree to which various IRM topics are considered important in an undergraduate and graduate courses in IRM. Ninety IS managers and sixty three MIS educators participated in the survey. Managers and educators agreed on the importance of topics related to planning and organization for coverage at both course levels. In addition, topics related to systems development and control were important at the undergraduate level, while topics related to IS staffing, and financing were important at the graduate level.

Information resources management (IRM) has been gradually evolving during the last decade as a sub-field within the discipline of management information systems (MIS). This new area of study has been recognized by both information systems (IS) managers and management information systems educators as making significant contributions towards the managing of information services and technologies as corporate assets. Although no universal definition exists of this emerging sub-field it has, however, evolved under the premise that information and information related technologies are vital organizational resources, and deserve to be managed as skillfully as other factors of production such as capital, land, and labor (Horton, 1977; Connell, 1981; Stonecash, 1981; Marchand and Horton, 1986; Otten, 1984; Guimaraes, 1988; Farkas-Conn, 1989; Trauth, 1989; McLeod, 1990).

Managers have responded to IRM by developing executive education programs on information technology (McNurlin, 1989), and by increasingly using the services of consulting firms specializing in IRM (Bryce, 1989). Academic institutions have responded by developing and offering courses in IRM (Lee, 1988).

Because IRM is still at an early stage of development, there is not a clear understanding of the various areas that comprise it (Smith and Medley, 1987; O’Brien and Morgan, 1991), and...
the relative importance of each. This study reports the results of a survey of information systems managers and management information systems educators conducted to discover the degree to which various IRM topics and categories of topics are considered important for coverage in an undergraduate and a graduate course in IRM.

The purpose of the study is threefold:

1. Identify the important topics in IRM in the 1990s as reported by IS managers and MIS educators.
2. Identify the relative importances of categories of topics in IRM as they relate to an undergraduate and a graduate level course in IRM, as perceived by IS managers and MIS educators.
3. Determine the relative importances of IRM topics as they relate to an undergraduate and a graduate level course in IRM, as perceived by IS managers and MIS educators.

In addition to focusing on these three goals, we compare the results of this study with other works done in the MIS field. Existing guidelines for the teaching of IRM will be examined, as well as ways to improve the contents of courses in IRM.

The information in this paper will aid MIS educators and IS managers in improving the focus of IRM’s goals. Academicians will benefit since it will provide the importance ranking of topics and main topic categories in this sub-field. This information is valuable in the development of outlines for new courses in information resources management, and in prioritizing each topic. Furthermore, it will provide a baseline for educators to assess the status and direction of current IRM courses in their institutions. Finally, this study will provide firms with a basis for recognizing critical IRM issues, guiding their managers to successfully compete in the future.

Methodology

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved the construction of a list of IRM topics. The second phase gathered topic ranking information by sampling MIS educators and IS managers using mail survey questionnaire.

The preliminary list of IRM topics was derived from a search of the current literature in IRM. The list of topics was validated by a team of six managers and four educators knowledgeable in the MIS field. Forty-six topics thought to distinguish IRM within the MIS discipline were finally selected and made up the questionnaire. An explanation of each topic was included to insure common meaning. These topics were grouped in nine categories. Table 2 and 3 present the list of the nine categories and the topics in each category. Participants were asked to rate each topic according to their perception of its future importance in an IRM course at the undergraduate and graduate levels of study. Their evaluation were made on an asymmetrical, five-point Likert scale using the following qualitative judgement and corresponding values:

1 = Not important
2 = Somewhat important
3 = Important
4 = Very important
5 = Extremely important

The survey questionnaires were mailed to 180 IS managers and 140 MIS educators. The participants were randomly selected from the membership list of the Information Resources Management Association (IRMA). Of the 320 questionnaires mailed, 153 (48%) were completed and returned. Of the questionnaires returned, 90 (59%) were from IS managers and 63 (41%) were from MIS educators. Table 1 presents information regarding frequency distribution of the job positions held by the respondents.

The principal method used to identify and prioritize the nine categories and the topics was the ranking by mean scores. The topics were ranked by their means, with the topic with the highest mean being ranked first and the lowest being ranked forty-sixth. Table 2 contains the importance rankings of mean responses to IRM categories and topics for an undergraduate IRM course, by the information systems managers and man-